



Elder Financial Abuse

Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Jackie Lacey



Auto Sales Fraud

How do I recognize a questionable car deal?

Seniors often are the target of unethical auto dealers. These scam artists frequently conceal the poor condition of used cars. They also lure consumers with advertisements of cars they do not have or do not intend to sell – what is known as "bait and switch." Other dealer scams include attempting to inflate the interest rate at the time of financing and/or adding unnecessary items to the purchase price of the car.

Warning Signs

- A salesperson asks you what monthly car payment amount you are seeking.
- A salesperson says you can qualify for a car that appears beyond your budget.
- A salesperson tells you the dealership will not honor the offer if you walk away.
- A salesperson who negotiates the vehicle in one language but offers a sales contract in a different language. If the negotiation is conducted in Spanish, you are entitled to a contract in Spanish. Ask for it.

Prevention

- When negotiating a price, always focus on the total price of the car, not on monthly payments that appear to minimize the vehicle's cost.
- Do not be pressured into buying a car if you are unsure. Talk to friends or family about the vehicle offer before signing the sales contract. Under California law, once you sign the sales contract, the car is yours, with very few exceptions.
- Always review the vehicle sales contract before signing it. Make sure the terms of the car loan and your car payment amount are as promised. If the car dealership changes the terms of its offer at the time of signing the sales contract -- the price increases or interest rate jumps -- walk away.

You may check a dealer's license with the Department of Motor Vehicles (www.dmv.ca.gov/olinq2/welcome.do) and read the state's Car Buyer's Bill of Rights (www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/billrights_top.htm).